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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the experience of a non-Catholic Chair of a Communications Department during the University of Portland's (UP) on-going "return to Catholicity." The papal statement "Ex Corde Ecclesiae" on Catholic institutions and a recently completed UP strategic planning process intended to focus the university to be mission-driven rather than market-driven have heightened the importance of Catholicity at the university. Among responses was an effort, ultimately defeated, to actively recruit Catholic faculty members. Catholics and non-Catholics on the faculty argued against the proposal on legal and academic freedom grounds. A review of the Communications Department's academic programs is described followed by an administration response to the resulting report. The administrator questioned why the report did not mention the department's contribution to UP's Catholic mission. This interchange raised the question of the long-term compatibility of the department to a Catholic institution's mission as defined by the Pope and bishops. Finally the paper describes the nuances and difficulties of interpretation for an institution-wide memo announcing that faculty's presence was expected at a closing baccalaureate mass. It is concluded that discussion about the nature and role of Catholic colleges will continue in Catholic educational institutions. (Contains 12 references.) (JB)

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The Return to Catholicity: A Department Chair's Perspective

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The Return to Catholicity:
A Department Chair's Perspective

Like its predecessors, the 1988-1989 University of Portland *Bulletin* included a brief history of the university under the heading "General Information." In the 1989-1990 *Bulletin*, history changed. The first paragraph, which described the founding of the university in 1901 and its maturation under the leadership of the Congregation of Holy Cross, remained much the same as in the 1988-1989 *Bulletin*. But the second paragraph was different.

In the 1988-1989 *Bulletin*, the second paragraph read as follows:

> In 1967, the Congregation of Holy Cross transferred ownership and responsibility for the University to a board of regents composed of clergy and laity of various religious denominations. As a result, the University is today a wholly autonomous, private institution of higher learning governed by the board of regents in accordance with the bylaws of the University nonprofit corporation. It is supported by income from endowments, gifts, grants and student fees. (3)

In the 1989-1990 *Bulletin*, the second paragraph read as follows:

> In 1967, as a means of ecumenical outreach and to involve lay people in the governance of the University, Holy Cross transferred control to a board of regents, but continued its commitment to offer the University the service of its members. As a result, the University of Portland is today a Catholic

> university, governed by an independent board of regents composed of men and women of various religious denominations, with Holy Cross priests and brothers as members of its faculty, staff, and administration. (1)

Interestingly, both the 1988-1989 and 1989-1990 *Bulletins* also included a separate paragraph offering a brief overall description of the university. This paragraph, which was identical in the two *Bulletins*, began with the statement that "The University of Portland is a Catholic university open to students of all races, nationalities, and religions" (1; 3). Given this statement, the change in the description of the university's history may be regarded as more a clarification of its identity than a reinterpretation of its history. In case anyone misses the point, University of Portland publications, including the *Bulletin,* now have the University's logo on the back cover, complete with the statement "Oregon's Catholic University."

In fact, no one at the university was ever in doubt that the University of Portland is a Catholic university, or that the Congregation of Holy Cross remains committed to the university. Certainly I was never in doubt, and I am not Catholic. The question is, what does it mean that a university is Catholic, especially in a time of increased emphasis on its Catholicity? My answer to this question will discuss my experiences as a department chair at the University of Portland that seem related to the larger discussions within the church regarding Catholic higher education.

The obvious explanation for the rewrite of the University of Portland's *Bulletin* is that "Ex Corde Ecclesiae" requires universities to make their Catholic identity known (John Paul II 266). The catalog change occurred during the lengthy discussion that preceded the release of the apostolic

constitution—a discussion that made clear the expectation that "Catholic" would be capitalized when used in conjunction with "university." However, the University of Portland has gone beyond changing its *Bulletin* to emphasize its Catholic identity.

Three years ago the University of Portland initiated a strategic planning process. The process is intended to focus the efforts of the university, with special attention paid to assure that the university is mission-driven rather than market-driven. Recently updated "Planning Directions" issued by the university officers include one statement that affirms the university's mission is Catholic: "We will continue our efforts to identify a projected profile of our student body to guide our future recruitment with special emphasis on academic qualifications and on the recruitment of Catholic students, of minorities, and of potential majors in selected programs." A department chair might wonder what the future will hold for programs that attract many non-Catholic students.

The University of Portland has also made efforts to recruit Catholic faculty. One of these efforts is long-standing, reflecting the special relationship of the Holy Cross community to the university. The Statutes of the University of Portland state the board of regents' desire to continue the "presence of the Holy Cross Community within the University in responsible capacities and in sufficient numbers. Accordingly, special consideration is given to qualified members of the Holy Cross Community, and the board encourages the Holy Cross Community to present interested and qualified candidates, not only for faculty positions, but also for administrative positions, and most especially for the office of President of the University" (Statute V: Affirmative Action). In practice, five positions have been reserved for members of the Congregation of Holy Cross: the president of the

university, the academic vice president, the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, the chair of the theology department, and the director of campus ministry.

Two years ago, a new effort was made to recruit Catholic faculty members. The College of Arts and Sciences was updating its hiring procedures, and someone in the upper administration suggested that the procedures provide for giving preference to qualified Catholic candidates. This suggestion is in keeping with Article 4 of the General Norms of "Ex Corde Ecclesiae," which states: "In order not to endanger the Catholic identity of the university or institute of higher studies, the number of non-Catholic teachers should not be allowed to constitute a majority within the institution, which is and must remain Catholic" (John Paul II 274). Frankly, I have no idea of the proportion of non-Catholic to Catholic teachers at the University of Portland, but the department chairs of the College of Arts and Sciences—Catholic and non-Catholic alike—successfully resisted the suggestion that Catholics receive preference in faculty hiring decisions.

The department chairs' discussion of the proposed hiring preference was instructive to me as a non-Catholic. I was troubled by the implications of the proposal, but I limited my comments to the legal difficulties of a procedure that would require us to ascertain the religion of candidates for faculty positions. Catholic department chairs, including a nun and a Holy Cross priest who served for many years as dean of the college, questioned the wisdom of the proposal in broader terms. I was especially struck by the arguments of the nun, who confirmed to me in a later conversation her particular concern that the proposal could have limited academic freedom. Happily, we found an acceptable alternative that candidates be informed of

the university's Catholic mission and indicate their ability to respect that mission in order to be finalists for faculty positions.

Obviously, concerns about academic freedom are central in faculty discussions of "Ex Corde Ecclesiae," as well as in discussions of the bishops' plans for implementing the apostolic constitution (Collison, "Church's Proposed Rules" A20) and those portions of "Veritatis Splendor" that instruct bishops to insure that theologians in Catholic universities "faithfully" teach the word of God (Collison, "Encyclical's Insistence" A19). Since I chair a communication studies rather than a theology department, these threats to academic freedom are more distant than they might be. Yet all the members of a university community are responsible for protecting academic freedom, a fact brought home to me as chairs of various departments wrestled with the proposal to give Catholic candidates preference in faculty hiring. And sometimes the threat to academic freedom, and to membership in the university community, seems more personal.

Two years ago my department conducted a thorough review of our academic programs, including an assessment by an outside evaluator. Our review was one of the first conducted within the College of Arts and Sciences, which initiated the program reviews in response to a recommendation in the university's accreditation self-study report in 1990 (77). Our program review was detailed in a candid, in-depth report that included our faculty's reflections and recommendations, the thoughtful assessments of our students and alumni, and evaluations of our programs by colleagues throughout the university. We were proud of our report, and we have since implemented the refinements to our curriculum and the changes in our admissions procedures and standards called for in the report. We have received welcome support from the dean of the college and the central

administration in our efforts to improve our programs, but one early assessment of our report was disturbing.

The dean's initial response to our report noted some omissions in it, including our failure to comment on the adequacy of library holdings to support our programs. He was right about that—we did not comment on library holdings because we were satisfied with them. However, the dean also took us to task for not discussing the contributions of our programs to the university's mission. He suggested that we spend part of the coming year assessing the relationship of our department's mission statement to the university's mission statement. We were astounded by the dean's criticism. We had discussed the university's mission statement at length, and our report included several explanations of how our programs addressed it. I quickly telephoned the dean to question his comments. In fact, I called him three times that day, twice at home. As you might guess, I was responding defensively, especially since, as department chair, I was the primary author of the report. Later I wrote a letter responding to his comments, and I gave him an additional copy of the report with those sections discussing the university's mission highlighted in bright green.

During my initial telephone conversation with the dean, he explained his comment that our report did not discuss the university's mission by noting that we said nothing about the university being Catholic. In later conversations with the dean, I discovered that his point was primarily that we did not mention contributions that our department was making to Catholic organizations throughout the city—contributions most often made by our video program, but also by our publication production classes and our student interns. But the dean's initial suggestion that we examine the relationship of our department's mission statement to the university's

mission statement has stuck in my mind, especially when I reflect on the Pope's recent pronouncements on Catholic higher education.

Our department's mission statement reflects the rhetorical foundation of our discipline. It assumes that social truths and justice are forged in the free marketplace of ideas, where informed people discuss and debate the issues that define our society. Our department's mission is to help our students acquire the communication skills and understandings necessary to engage in informed public decision making. The Pope's recent encyclical acknowledges that "exchanges and conflicts of opinion may constitute normal expressions of public life in a representative democracy," but points out that moral teaching "is in no way established by following the rules and deliberative procedures typical of a democracy." Thus, theologians are not supposed to dissent publicly regarding the church's moral teachings, and bishops are obligated, "in communion with the Holy See, both to grant the title 'Catholic' to Church-related schools, universities, health-care facilities and counseling services, and, in case of serious failure to live up to that title, to take it away" ("Excerpts"). I wonder, is our department's mission truly compatible with the mission of a Catholic university, as defined by the Pope and his bishops?

In part, my concerns about my department's place in the university are a response to the hierarchical nature of the church and the university. As a department chair, I have a role to play in the hierarchy. The university's "Articles of Administration" spell out that role:

> Department Heads are to be both administrators and representatives of the Departmental faculty. Thus, they should seek to know the mind of the faculty and to keep the faculty

> informed concerning the development and execution of academic policies. While it is their duty to supervise the application of University policy within their departments, it is also recognized that their representation of the views of their departments is influential in the development of that policy. (31)

Sometimes the university policy at issue is not academic. For example, at the end of the year faculty are informed by memo that their attendance at baccalaureate mass is "expected." Last spring, none of the seven full-time members of our faculty was Catholic. Our faculty members wondered whether non-Catholics were required to attend mass. As department chair, I asked the dean about this, who told me that the real point was that the administration wanted the faculty to participate in as many graduation events as possible. (Interestingly, another department chair told members of her faculty that attendance at mass was mandatory; I do not know whether she consulted the dean.) The dean's response to my question reassured the faculty members in our department, and we attended as many graduation events as we could, although only one faculty member attended the mass. Yet the ambiguously stated "expectation" communicated from the upper reaches of the university's hierarchy was troubling, and I found it difficult to ask the dean about it. Probably because I am not a Catholic, I have a tendency to see the church and university as monolithic, and questioning the hierarchy about attending mass seemed to me one more indication that my departmental colleagues and I were but marginal members of the Catholic university community.

So, what do I make of all this? I am in my thirteenth year at the University of Portland, and I want to believe that my department and I are and will continue to be valued members of the university community. Yet

the recent emphasis on the university's Catholic identity reminds me of a statement made by the acting president when he informed me in 1990 that I was being promoted to full professor: He said that the only question raised during the review of my qualifications for promotion concerned the depth of my commitment to Catholic higher education.

The University of Portland is a Catholic university, and recent attempts to emphasize its Catholic identity have made some faculty members uncomfortable, especially in light of the Pope's pronouncements on Catholic higher education. But my experiences as a department chair at the University of Portland have given me another perspective on what is happening. The fact that Catholic department chairs joined with non-Catholic department chairs in rejecting a preference for Catholics in faculty hiring demonstrates that the church and the university are not monolithic. This point is vitally important. The Pope and his bishops may attempt to limit public dissent by university theologians regarding the church's moral teachings, but discussion and debate will and must continue within Catholic universities (cf. Oddo).

Despite its title, the issue that this essay addresses is not really the return to Catholicity by Catholic universities. The real issue is the continuing dialogue within Catholic universities and the church regarding what it means to be a Catholic university. I strongly endorse a statement on what it means to be a Catholic university crafted by my colleagues at the University of Portland during a discussion of the university's purpose and identity as part of our institutional self-study for accreditation:

> UP is a Catholic university by our religious origin, and by our past and continuing commitment to the living Catholic tradition. This tradition is intellectual—we pursue an

intellectual understanding of all things, including our own faith. We insist upon intellectual honesty and so our approach is academic and not dogmatic. The Catholic tradition also emphasizes service to others. So while we believe that personal ethics are important, we also believe that issues of social justice and international peace are important as well. We are concerned with the problems of modern society. And the Catholic tradition is inclusive, not exclusive.

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